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ENCHANTED APRIL: Stellar Production at Actors'NET of Bucks County

Posted by **Walter Bender**

There are times when being a reviewer can be a complete pleasure...we so often look at a play with a critical eye, seeing the blemishes in a production, and so rarely can just sit back and be entertained. I had the exception on Saturday night, when I went to Actors'NET of Bucks County to see their production of ENCHANTED APRIL.

ENCHANTED APRIL is an adaptation of the 1922 novel by Elizabeth von Arnim, *The Enchanted April*. While visiting her women's club Lotty Wilton (Carol Thompson) reads an ad in the paper about an Italian castle for rent for the month of April, as she sees Rose Arnott (Kyla Mostello Donnelly) sitting at a table near her. She recognizes Rose as a member of her church, which she has classified as having a "face like a disappointed Madonna" and sees in her a kindred spirit, in need of a holiday to escape a dissatisfying home life. After a bit of convincing, Lotty and Rose agree to rent the castle, and place an ad for other ladies to share the expenses. They meet and agree on Lady Caroline Bramble (Cat Miller) and Mrs. Graves (Virginia Barrie) as companions for the trip. Lady Caroline is a beautiful socialite, and Mrs. Graves is a stern Victorian woman very set in her ways.



Curtis Kaine and Kyla Mostello Donnelly in a scene from ENCHANTED APRIL at Actors'NET of Bucks County.



Virginia Barrie and Michael Wurzel in a scene from ENCHANTED APRIL.

Director George Hartpence has done a stellar job with this production, starting with perfect casting. Thompson plays Lotty as the perpetual optimist, always looking at the beauty of any situation without getting cloyingly sweet or annoying. Donnelly also nails her character as the pious disappointed Madonna as she is described who blossoms in the Italian environment. Miller is spot-on as the initially aloof and private Lady Caroline, yet allows her vulnerability to show as things progress. Barrie is hilarious as the elderly widow who is very set in her ways (with a penchant for English Walnuts) who learns tolerance and respect. The ladies work beautifully together, their interaction very believable.

The rest of the cast is also first-rate. C. Jameson Bradley plays Mellersh Wilton (Lotty's husband) as the stern unyielding British gentleman who doesn't allow anything to interfere with his orderly life, until he comes to visit Lotty in Italy. Curtis Caine is broad and blustery as writer Frederick Arnott, who (as his pen name Florian Ayers) comes to Italy to meet Lady Caroline, and finds his attempted assignation taking an unexpectedly happy turn for all. Michael Wurzel is Anthony Wilding the owner of the castle, and is the perfect gentleman and host. Cheryl Doyle is Costanza the cook and maid, and is hilarious in a role that does not allow her to speak a word of English, only Italian. Even with the language barrier (to cast and audience) she gets her point across to the delight of everyone. Finally, Marco Newton is Marco the handyman (an added character for this production.) Marco adds additional comic relief at the appropriate times.

The set adds to the beauty of the production. Act I is minimal setting, mainly 2 small tables, 4 chairs and a coat rack rearranged with props added as needed on the forefront of the stage. This minimal staging adds to the dreariness and claustrophobic feel of the ladies' existence, and the audience is caught up in their need to escape, if only for a few weeks. During the intermission the stage is opened up to reveal the courtyard of the castle, with flowers adorning the walls, a beautiful vista in the background.

I loved this production. The characters were all allowed to show their vulnerability, losing that British "stiff upper lip" that so many other versions of this show have had. The cleverness of the action added to the fun...Mellersh trimming his formidable handlebar mustache while he and Lotty discuss their life, Frederick autographing copies of his book, Mrs. Graves using an antique nut cracker...I enjoyed all the little touches Hartpence and the cast added. This is a terrific production, and should not be missed.



Cat Miller is spot-on as the initially aloof and private Lady Caroline in Actors'NET of Bucks County's ENCHANTED APRIL.

ENCHANTED APRIL

Written by Matthem Barber, from the novel by Elizabeth von Arnim

Directed by George Hartpence

April 19-May 12, 2013

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Walter Bender

Walter Bender is a veteran of over 35 years performing all over the country. He attended Texas Lutheran University as a Theatre Arts and Vocal Performance major. While in college he toured much of the Southern and Western states with various acting and singing groups. He appeared briefly on radio in San Antonio and on TV in Miami while in college. Moving back to PA, he has performed in well over 100 amateur and professional theatrical productions, and directed dozens more throughout the Mid-Atlantic region. Among his favorite roles are Lt. Colonel Jessup (A Few Good Men), Daddy Warbucks (Annie), and most recently he was George in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Arguably his favorite theatrical memory was creating the role of Alan Frick in A Fast Train to Heaven for Bill Gottshall Productions. He is co-founder of Spring-Ford Community Theater, has served as Managing Director of 2 different theaters, Artistic Director of a third and President of another. He worked for the Delaware Valley Arts Institute, where he worked with many wonderful artists and instructors, culminating in being selected to facilitate a post-graduate course at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia. Currently he serves on the board of directors for dcp theatre as their Director of Corporate Communications.

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